

Approved For Release 2004/01/29 : CIA-RDP84-00780R001500050039-1  
MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Support

In speaking to the recent Chief of Station Seminar concerning the Agency's image, I asked the members to forward their views to me and these views are attached. Please review these and forward any recommendations you may have, in the briefest possible form.



Richard Helms  
Deputy Director

24 MAY 1966

(DATE)

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TRANSMITTAL SLIP		DATE
TO: Director of Training		
ROOM NO.	BUILDING	
532	1000 Glebe	
REMARKS:		
<div>Dr <input type="checkbox"/></div> <p>Would you please make the review and prepare for Mr. Bannerman's signature the recommendation requested in the attached note from Mr. Helms.</p> <p>SUSPENSE: 3 June</p>		
FROM: Assistant Executive Officer to the DD/S		
ROOM NO.	BUILDING	EXTENSION
7D18	Hqs	<input type="checkbox"/>
FORM NO. 241		
1 FEB 55		
REPLACES FORM 36-8 WHICH MAY BE USED.		
☆ GPO: 1957-O-439445 (47)		

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I end up with no more helpful conclusion than this, which I'm sure will come as no new thought to any senior Agency official. In the long run, the solution of the problem of an acceptable image will be a function of the quality of Agency personnel up and down the line. We can overcome our built-in disadvantages (basic American attitudes which run counter to the concept of clandestine operations and the use of power, real or imagined encroachment upon the vested interests of longer established Agencies, etc.) only by demonstrated effectiveness of results in the field of operations, by the indisputable quality of our work in other words. Only this in the long run will appease Congress, the White House, State, the press, etc. And quality of operations is simply another way of saying quality of personnel. Hence, as I see it, every emphasis we place upon recruitment of promising young men as staff officers, upon their careful and unhurried training and development, upon adequacy of salaries and advancement opportunity, upon mid-career and senior training--all designed to get, keep and improve Agency personnel--with each such action, we make a direct, though long term, contribution to enhancement of our image. No gimmicks will do it, no single solution will do it, and nothing will change things with overnight rapidity in as many-faceted and tricky a field as this.

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Experience has demonstrated that it is impossible to prevent the information media from acquiring knowledge of the Agency's activities, and there are no legal means whereby the media can be effectively restrained from publicizing its knowledge. Consequently, the protection of sensitive information from public disclosure ultimately depends upon the media's self-restraint.

The information media are reluctant to exercise self-censorship but they will practice self-restraint if they are convinced of the need for protecting certain information. "No responsible newspaper", states the New York Times, "would knowingly damage the national interest." In World War I and II, the media recognized the need for not disclosing certain information and cooperated voluntarily with the Committee on Public Information (WW I) and the Office of Censorship (WW II) in protecting this information. Neither of these organizations was empowered with any executive or legal means of restraining the media and their effectiveness depended entirely on their powers of persuasion. The Agency's problem (and presumably the government's) is to convince the information media that continued exposure of the Agency's activities is contrary to the national interest. This can be achieved only by the establishment of close working relations with selected elements of the media and the subsequent exploitation of these relations. The newspaper medium is anxious to establish closer relations with the Agency for, as expressed by the New York Times, there is a need for "a greater accessibility of officials so that newspaper men may have frank and informed advice on the harm that might come from revelation of a discovered secret".

No solution of the problem can be hoped for as long as the Agency pursues a purely "no comment" attitude. The information media can be hostile or friendly; an attempt should be made to enlist their friendship and support.

As for the Agency's public image, Benjamin Welles of the New York Times summed up my feeling when he said, "The Agency desperately needs the advice and services of some competent public relations experts".

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1. Given the nature of the U.S. press, a certain amount of adverse publicity is inevitable and must simply be absorbed. Ramifications of certain types of flaps or accusations by hostile elements in other countries cannot be avoided. However, despite the cliché that our failures are trumpeted and our successes unheralded, there has obviously been an attempt at "image improvement" through the revelation to certain authors and newspaper people of successful CIA operations. (The writer does not know whether this resulted from purposeful official public relations policy or from unauthorized leaks.) Otherwise, there would be no explanation for the ability of writer after writer to cite a series of CIA covert actions in various countries abroad. Unfortunately, such publicity has boomeranged, for in numerous subsequent write-ups on CIA activities these have been cited negatively as evidence of CIA interference in the internal affairs of other nations. In short, although we cannot conceal flaps which break the surface nor avoid certain spontaneous or inspired attacks, we certainly can ensure that our role in successful covert actions does not reach the public domain. Let's not hand the publicists the tools with which to attack us.

2. In the final analysis the aspect of the CIA image which counts the most is our standing with the White House, State, and Defense. And that standing depends largely upon performance--making a contribution which becomes increasingly indispensable to our main customers. However, the greatest resentment and backbiting seems to come from State officers and sometimes we appear to have contributed to their resentment. For example, one friendly Foreign Service officer told me that a CIA officer at his last post told him: "Just wait a couple of years and we'll take you over". Apparently there is need to indoctrinate our own officers in how to handle State in a sensible and mutually respectful fashion.

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The Agency's image does not seem to me to be as shabby as the present flood of publicity, some of it unflattering, might indicate. This publicity, including the indirect kind--TV programs, spy novels--could very well mean that the image is actually a good one. I doubt that the general public would absorb this deluge did it not view the Agency with a somewhat romantic but not unsympathetic interest. To the public there is an aura of glamour around the CIA just as there is, to the public, around the FBI.

The Agency's image in Washington, D. C., may be tarnished although I tend to doubt it. But if the image is to be improved, one might examine J. Edgar Hoover's success with the image of the FBI, which he symbolizes. This image is impeccable even though Big Crime--interstate crime--is bigger and more interstate than ever before. How does Mr. Hoover do this?

I have no real idea but, aside from his ability to project an imposing figure of himself, he apparently has some discreet mechanism for emphasizing his successes and minimizing his failures.

Could not we leak some success stories? Like the well-written case studies (sanitized to some extent) used by OTR, these leaked stories could retain elements of risk, excitement and clever work in a good cause. These characteristics are all present in some of our work and, although the CIA officer will never become a folk hero like the FBI man, a few good, rattling stories about past successes might improve his image--if it really needs it--and be good reading besides.



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1. The problem would appear to be simple: We cannot have our cake and eat it too; we are either a "silent service" or we should go the route of the FBI and do a public relations job on ourselves. But like all real-life problems, the answer for CIA must lie somewhere between. Our image is being hurt. Mr. Helms feels that we are hypersensitive because of our geographical setting in Washington, that our image is better in East Podunk.

2. He may be right, but I suspect that unless some words are widely voiced to counter the wave of innuendo and half-truths concerning CIA operations, then constant erosion of confidence will take place and we will be in trouble even in East Podunk. What kind of trouble? An erosion of confidence in CIA on the part of a substantial sector of the electorate would inevitably translate itself into an attitude on the part of our elected officials. We could find our activities, particularly in the CA field, increasingly constricted at the budget and policy levels, through the constant impact of public opinion upon the White House, Department of State, Bureau of the Budget, etc., to say nothing of foreign governments. Further, CIA will always be only as good as its people; and when we no longer get the real good young men, we're in trouble.

3. I do not argue for opening a broadside of self-generated favorable publicity as the FBI has done when it felt itself under fire. But there certainly are some subtle steps to be taken. Have we no friends of stature who could speak out publicly for us in Congress, business circles, the media? The Penkovsky case is a gem--it is still on the best seller list and while the role of CIA is minimized in the book, a serious playwright or TV producer might be able to highlight some of the more dramatic aspects of the case and play up the role of CIA, especially if we gave him access to further information and background material. The same holds true for some of our other sexy cases that would not necessarily reveal an embarrassing presence in foreign lands.

4. We must develop better personal relations with key figures in TV, radio and the press. Every senior CIA official should participate in a program to cultivate influential media figures. Personal as opposed to official relationships of this nature can be vital.

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5. In sum, we must be even more thick-skinned but we must realize that CIA is no longer in the shadows, it is in the public domain. We therefore must have a quiet, low-key, effort to counter the one-sided exposure to which we are being submitted.

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The area where we should be very concerned about CIA's image is that which prevails on college campuses. If the image is poor and there is prejudice against us it will be very difficult to attract the bright young students interested in international relations for service on a career basis. Statements by top government officials in defense of CIA such as one made recently by the Secretary of State at a press conference are necessary and do invaluable good. They need to be augmented, I believe, by effective personal contacts between Agency representatives and students. To be more effective I think these contacts should be made by top calibre Agency representatives and in conjunction with visits by representatives of other services recruiting for foreign affairs specialists. Certainly the Department of State representative would be the most logical one to team up with, but USIA or AID could also be represented. This would clearly indicate that the intelligence service is an essential part of this country's overseas effort and that CIA specifically is a member in good standing. It might be helpful if the CIA wife also accompanied to assure coeds marriage and an intelligence career are compatible.

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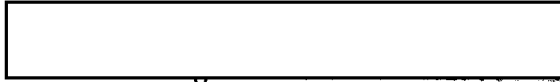
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In terms of CIA's image, particularly in the aftermath of recent publicity, perhaps a program could be instituted, or augmented if such exists, wherein speakers identified with the Agency deliver lectures around the U.S. much as the Department of State now does. Personally speaking, I don't really believe that much can or should be done regarding the image. Obviously we must combat disinformation about the Agency but I'm not convinced much can be gained by a public relations program or Madison Avenue approach to the Agency. The nature of the beast really precludes a normal approach to the problem of "image building". We are too vulnerable and exotic a target in our society to effectively negate or counter all the attacks and charges which have come and will continue to come. "Grin and bear it" may be all we can and even should do except in those cases where the charges are grave enough to warrant some action through the media or government spokesmen.

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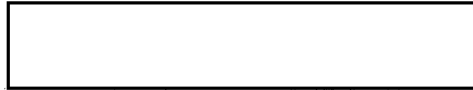


The only idea I have to offer is to refer to the difference between a press policy which is confined to reacting to situations which are thrust upon us and one which actively seeks to present CIA and its works in a favorable light. In the beginning, we naturally hoped to avoid all publicity. This has proven to be impossible, so perhaps we should move into the field and take a positive stance. As an example, take the way Hoover in the 1930s revolutionized the popular image of the Federal Cop. In doing this he drew heavily on the innate sense of responsibility of the individual citizen for law enforcement and developed this sense to the lasting advantage of the G-man. And in doing so, few if any significant operational secrets of the FBI were disclosed. Significant to our problem is the fact that one of the results was to ease, rather than to complicate, the G-man's task of security, the cooperation of individuals for clandestine work.

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1. The Agency has a mission to perform for the Government of the United States as directed by the people through the Congress in a public law. We should never be defensive about our reason for being or apologize for it. Some of our activities (DDP) by their very nature are classified instruments for the Chief Executive alone and are, therefore, privileged and confidential. The task is to respond to examination by the public while, at the same time, protecting the privacy of the President.

2. I suggest that we ought to act rather than react. By doing so, the public and the Congress will see the initiative for compatible relations coming from the Agency. At the same time, by holding the initiative, we can better protect that which must be protected.

3. The Agency might consider trying to take away some of the mystery surrounding our environment. Other agencies (Department of State, Department of Defense, Atomic Energy Commission) have secrets but yet, through a well-managed public relations program, maintain a position of responsibility in the eyes of the public.

4. It would seem that the best way to deflate the mystery and sensationalism that accompany the Agency's public image would be an educational program which would, of course, have to be very responsibly managed and done on a well-programmed basis. Some examples of what might be done are:

a. a continuing series of discussions and debates with important educators, covering the purposes of the Agency, its evolution and its responsibilities;

b. aggressively seek out important media and opinion-makers throughout the country and hold on a continuing basis scheduled back-grounders, helping them put the Agency in its proper perspective;

c. invite the queries and questions of Congress;

d. in cases of libel, little is to be lost by the Agency going to court and discrediting the slanderer;

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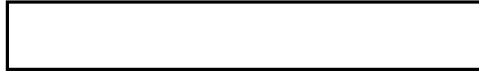
e. Through a properly timed and programmed release of information put into the public domain, either to Congress and/or educators and/or the general public about those programs that are impossible to keep secret;

f. organize an Agency publication bureau similar to those in other Government agencies (who also handle very highly classified material) through which useful unclassified material can be made available to educators and the public.

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From a perspective of seventeen years spent entirely in the DD/P and its predecessor entity, I find myself almost amused at the degree of contemporary concern over the "damage" being done the CIA (DD/P) image--i.e., the concern by DD/P officers (perhaps it is more appropriately labeled injured professional pride rather than concern). There probably is no question that on balance CIA's "bad press" world-wide exceeds its "good press". There probably is no question also that some will be influenced by the "bad press" in a manner which we should not like to see happen. Others will remain indifferent. I would venture that were it possible to assess all returns on the question, we would find the CIA image not badly held, either in the United States or abroad. It is in respect to the latter that the individual DD/P officer has an opportunity to gauge "damage" to CIA done by the adverse-factor publicity in a bread and butter area, namely in the recruitment of foreign national intelligence agents. I submit that world-wide, no single anti-CIA expose or even the entire accumulation of them in the last decade and a half, has significantly affected the DD/P ability to recruit in the interests of the Free World. To me, this is the real yardstick.

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Thus, although I do not agree that a poor image exists and do not wish to be considered Pollyanna on the question, I firmly believe that the best thing that can be done in the situation is (a) to continue to permit an authorized rebuttal to damaging publicity when it arises and is considered

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deserving of comment, and (b) for the individual DD/P officer to clean his own little corner and keep it clean. We can't control outpourings against us, but we can control to a considerable degree the incidence of vulnerabilities which permit the outpourings. This application of correctives from within will certainly not stop attacks, but it will tend to keep for us an ability to manage a defense of the image within reason.

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I am not certain that the Agency should take steps to improve its public image, particularly if these steps are being considered as a reply to the recent flurry of newspaper articles on the Agency. To take an active position to counter these articles would only serve to prolong the debate which I feel will die a natural death if left to itself. If the newspapers get no rise from the Agency, they will soon lose interest.

However, the request has been made for suggestions of ways to improve the Agency's public image. I would suggest two ways: One, a word of mouth campaign within the Congress; the other a TV program series somewhat like the TV program on the FBI.

First, I would call on the Democratic and Republican Party leaders in both the Senate and House and ask their cooperation in handling the problem of attacks on the Agency by members of both Houses of Congress. My approach would be that we do not mind criticism and the last thing we wish is that Senators and Congressmen should feel that we were trying to prevent them from doing their job as they saw fit. However, we felt we were doing a good job and making a significant contribution to the National Security of our country in spite of some mistakes which had been made in the past. Unwarranted attacks on the Agency certainly do not do the Agency any good either at home or abroad. Abroad, much of our work is dependent upon developing the confidence of our sources in the Agency's ability. When the Agency is attacked by the leaders of our Government, this naturally affects this relationship abroad in that sources may question the ability of the Agency and doubt the backing of the Government for Agency activities.

Second, I would consider putting on a TV series designed to show the public some of the work the Agency does abroad. This TV series would include items which are already known to the opposition and which are not highly secret. Such items might be the handling of walk-ins and their processing through host governments and international refugee channels; simple agent cases showing the use of tradecraft; and some routine CI investigations. This type of TV program could be produced using the same techniques as used by the FBI program on TV.

If the above TV series were handled properly, it could do much to enlighten the public on the Agency's work without seriously jeopardizing the Agency's security, and could increase the public's consciousness of the need of the Agency to stay in the realm of anonymity rather than on the front page of every newspaper.

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1. The adverse reactions to CIA are reflections from various groups for different reasons. The following outline will merely high-light these and suggest courses of action which may improve the situation.

a. The traditional opposition of the American people to "spying as contrary to democratic principles". This attitude cannot be changed until the people are "educated" to believe that American institutions of espionage abroad are loyal, patriotic institutions dedicated to protecting and preserving the aforementioned democratic principles.

b. Attacks and exposures by news and entertainment media which are due to (a) a reflection of para. 1 above; (b) political alignment; (c) disagreement on foreign policy; (d) disinformation; (e) reaction to specific incidents such as the "Bay of Pigs". Contact with all media should be infrequent and centrally and tightly controlled. When info or handouts are given, the data should be honest and should reflect (a) actions in support of U.S. policy; (b) defense of U.S. traditional institutions; (c) exposure of commie aims; (d) frustration of commie subversion. This info should always emphasize a positive advancement of a U.S. democratic aim.

c. Opposition by other Government Agencies. This can be countered only by better security, more effective liaison at all levels, better coordination and cooperation in the field and exchange of officer assignments in Washington and the field.

d. Opposition by Congress. If this is not solely politically motivated, it may be reduced by selected briefings. A decision on the Watchdog Committee must be left to the President.

e. Opposition by the Executive Branch. The DCI and DDCI must use every opportunity to make the Executive office aware of our positive professional contribution in support of U.S. policy.

f. Opposition by world-wide media due to disinformation. We must educate our allies to the techniques of disinformation. We could also launch a world-wide attack of our own to discredit the enemy service to help convince him that their disinformation program is counter-productive. We must also continue to expose disinformation activities when they are so identified.

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g. Opposition by friendly allies. Better liaison,  hand-outs and our own professional cooperation will help reduce this.

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h. There are many other groups and individuals who oppose us but they cannot be dealt with individually.

2. Certain postures and courses of action may serve to improve our image in a positive manner by giving the opposition a less vulnerable target.

a. In describing or publicizing Agency functions we should emphasize collection responsibilities and support of U.S. policy aims and play down covert action and PM.

b. We should concentrate on improving our professionalism so as to assure successful completion of mission and fewer flaps, thus reducing publicity.

c. Over the long run we should strive to make the Agency less conspicuous by:

1. wider use of deep cover
2. improvement of professionalism
3. better security to protect plans, operations, and agents
4. control rigidly all contacts with news media
5. reduce friction with other government agencies by closer coordination, cooperation, exchange of employees, etc. Nurture the truth that we are co-equal partners sharing responsibilities.

3. You might consider the assignment of a full time senior officer with a small competent staff to make a continuing study of the "image" problem, take certain actions and make recommendations for improvement. This officer would, as occasion demands, prepare guidance for your signature. This officer should then follow up on these orders by personal contact with sections or persons whose actions precipitated the reaction which resulted in the order. To avoid the focus of attention on this assignment, the officer should be called Special Project Officer (not IMAGE officer).

4. Finally, in preparation for the possibility that certain future events may make Congress, the Executive and the people more receptive to acceptance, we should keep on the "ready shelf", our version of an "Official Secrets Act".

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Statement by

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The problem is in many respects a contradiction in terms. The Agency as a whole should have a minimal public image and the DDP none at all. Various circumstances of American culture, journalistic traditions and Agency history do not permit such low visibility. However, our fall-back position and continuing effort should be to keep CIA out of the public eye to the extent possible and to respond publicly to attacks and allegations only in extreme cases. Any extensive effort to repaint, repair or gild our image would only heighten our visibility. CIA and DDP defense should be from within--i.e., effective operations, impressive production and, most important, increased operational, personnel and cover security. We should sell ourselves to our customers in the U.S. Government and only indirectly to other public at large. Our effort then should be a defensive one. Those who tarnish our image, both domestic and foreign enemies, should be countered only rarely in public. If our performance is sound and secure, we should be able to weather the hopefully seasonal publicity of the type we are undergoing at present.

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